

Dump holds three types of chemicals

Discovery surprises EPA team; no word on detecting dioxin

By Robert Engelman
A Member of the Staff

AURORA, Mo. — Federal Environmental Protection Agency scientists found three waste materials Tuesday in corroding 55-gallon drums discovered in a makeshift dump near this southwest Missouri town.

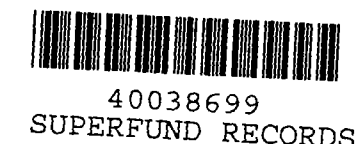
An eight-day excavation project at the dump — which is suspected of containing deadly dioxin — ended a day ahead of schedule Tuesday with the sampling of the drums' contents.

Witnesses to the dumping, conducted by the North East Pharmaceutical and Chemical Co. just before the company left the area in 1972, had told EPA that only one type of waste had been buried on the property, according to Dan Harris, the leader of the agency's team. But on Tuesday, excavators found what Harris described as "a clear liquid resembling water, a yellow-looking clear liquid, and a dark, tarlike syrupy or oily material."

"This isn't what we were told," Harris said. He declined to speculate on whether any of the materials might contain dioxin, the most potent man-made chemical killer, but said that if he were a laboratory technician, "I'd be most interested in the tarlike material."

Wearing "moon suits" and working gingerly with stainless steel spoons and disposable glass tubes, EPA workers withdrew 24 samples from eight of 15 drums found Monday within the wooded excavation site on the James Denney farm. The barrels, some with holes and some empty, were covered again with dirt Tuesday afternoon.

The discovery of more than one type
See DIOXIN, Page B-2, Col. 1



119423

Sit: Syntex Verona
ID: MOD007452154
Break: 13.3
Other: 0751
4/30/80

DIOXIN

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of waste complicated the EPA analysis and could weaken its final conclusions, since there is no way of knowing what other barrels still buried might contain. "Still I'll feel a lot more comfortable if we don't find dioxin with these tests," Harris said.

The EPA team extracted three sets of identical samples — one to be tested for dioxin at an EPA laboratory in Bay St. Louis, Miss., and a second to be analyzed for 193 other toxic substances at EPA laboratories in Kansas City, Kansas. The third set of samples is scheduled to be delivered to Syntex Agribusiness Inc., the company that inherited the pharmaceutical company's plant in nearby Verona and its waste products.

Harris said Syntex officials had requested the samples to conduct their own analysis of the dump's contents. But he added that no material would be released until Syntex informed EPA of the company's security measures for the potentially dangerous tests.

"It will be at least three weeks before Bay St. Louis completes its test-

ing, and the lab in Kansas City won't begin tests until they know there's no dioxin," Harris said.

The contents of the empty drums apparently poured into the surrounding soil long ago. Geologists estimate that ground water, which flows freely through the rocky and cave-pocked land here, lies from 50 to 100 feet below the long trench where up to 150 waste drums may be buried.

As a final measure today before returning to the Kansas City EPA office, Harris and his assistants will sample a handful of wells in the area for later chemical analysis. Calls have been coming in to the EPA's temporary office in the Aurora City Hall from worried residents requesting tests for their water supplies, but Harris said the test wells would be selected on the basis of geology alone.

No dioxin ever has been found in this area, except for a 20-foot steel tank containing 4,300 pounds of chemical sludge that the pharmaceutical company left behind when it handed its plant in Verona over to Syntex. Samples were drawn last fall from Aurora's water supply, private wells and a vacant lot outside of town said to have been used by the pharmaceutical company, but no trace of dioxin was found.